

CHAPTER VI

**SEARCHING THE ALTAR OF
AN UNKNOWN GOD:
TOMÁŠ HALÍK ON FAITH IN A SECULAR AGE**

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INTRODUCTION

Religion has always been a dynamic phenomenon. From a contextual theological perspective, the last century was full of turbulent changes on the European continent. What was a hundred years ago a highly religious culture, is today rather an indifferent and even religiously ignorant society. Nobody can doubt that the meaning of religion and religious identity has changed significantly. We got accustomed to call this process of changes *secularization*. Yet there are various different interpretations of this phenomenon. Some thinkers, for example, welcome secularization as a liberation of human beings from the bonds of religion.¹ Other authors approach secularization with sympathy because they believe it helps to purify institutional religions. Finally, there are those who oppose secularization and look for ways in which to stop this process or to reverse it. Many important studies on the topic of secularization and, consequently, on the changed conditions of faith have been published in recent years. One of the shining examples of such works is Charles Taylor's ground-breaking voluminous study *A Secular Age*.² One of the numerous merits of Taylor's work is that he points out clearly how and in what sense the theme of secularization is both a trauma and challenge for theologians, philosophers of religion and sociologists.

We dare to dedicate this chapter to an author who openly confesses that he feels to be "crucified between the paradoxes" of the

¹ Social anthropologist Anthony F. C. Wallace expresses such a conviction quite bluntly: "[T]he evolutionary future of religion is extinction. Belief in supernatural forces that affect nature without obeying nature's laws will erode and become only an interesting historical memory." Anthony F. C. Wallace, *Religion: An Anthropological View* (New York: Random House, 1966), pp. 264-265.

² Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

secular world and the world of religion. We will present an author who struggles with both faith and doubts. Furthermore, this author lives in one of the most secularized countries in Europe. His experience of being on the edges of belief and unbelief, the Church and the world leads him to an original (re)interpretation of secularization in particular and the current state of religion in general. The main subject of this study is to introduce this remarkable person, the Czech theologian, sociologist and philosopher Tomáš Halík.

We will divide this chapter into three parts. Firstly, we will outline Halík's description of the contemporary religious situation in Europe with special attention paid to the issue of secularization and its development in recent decades. We will work solely with Halík's ideas which at first sight seem to be rather eclectic, however, a closer engagement with them reveals numerous original insights formulated on the background of both contemporary theological-philosophical-sociological thought and a specific experience with a highly secular context, which is at the same time quite open to religious questions.³ This interesting interaction between secular and at the same time implicitly religious cultural strata will be pointed out in the second part of this chapter. To better illustrate Halík's position, we will highlight some specific characteristics of the Czech cultural context. Thirdly, we will test our hypothesis that Halík's thought leads to an original theological contribution which may help the Church to renew itself in contemporary postmodern context.

VOCATUS ET NONVOCATUS: EUROPE IN A SECULAR AGE

The post-Enlightenment development changed the religious map of Europe. Analogously to the situation after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, resulting in the rise of the two branches of an older religion in the Holy Land, modernity gave birth to the two competing cultures from the rubble of medieval *Christianitas*: the culture of the modern ecclesial Christianity and *Laïcité* – the modern lay secular culture. The former shaped quasi-ideological structures not dissimilar to the political and social movements of modernity. Next to Liberalism, Capitalism, and Socialism Catholicism and Protestantism appeared as other *-isms*. This internal development of Christianity has caused a paradigm change in the Christian tradition. *Laïcité* on the other hand developed its own specific form of religiosity implicitly present in

³ When we refer to other authorities, the purpose is to enlighten or to elaborate on Halík's arguments.

general culture as an “alternative” to the feuding camps of Catholics and Protestants.⁴ In many respects, secular culture under the flag of *laïcité* represents “a heterodox form of Christianity” but “it stays not outside but inside the broad historical stream of Christianity.”⁵ Arguably, there are two versions of Christianity which, in the words of Chesterton, tend to go crazy: *popular* (religion as *pietas*) and *intellectual* (religion as a spiritual-humanistic philosophy). Intellectual religion leads most often to agnosticism and subsequently to atheism, whereas “*pietas* religion” tends to take the form of new religious movements.⁶

The consequence of this complicated development has been gradual mutual alienation of the Christian and the lay culture. Moreover, a secular culture began to be superior in numbers and, after all, the non-Churched laity has won Europe culturally and politically. The winning side was strongly linked to the modern natural science that – having replaced theology – has become “the language of the modern elite and the arbiter of truth.”⁷ Halík aptly summarizes the situation as the defeat of traditional Christianity which was replaced by a modern religion.

The ecclesial Christianity responded in two unfortunate ways: liberalism and traditionalism/fundamentalism. Liberalism proclaims that the relationship between Christianity and the prevailing culture must be considered in terms of continuity. In contrast, fundamentalism postulates an unbridgeable gap between *societas terrena* (secular world) and *societas perfecta* (the ecclesial type of Christianity). Although the so-called correlation theology, an heir of the former, makes a lot of effort to translate Christian language into secular terms and survives till these days, the latter have proved to be stronger. From the turn of the 19th and 20th century when the anti-modernist fight flared up, through the opposition to any sort of openness to contemporary culture about the time of Vatican II, to the late pontificate of Benedict XVI, the spectre of traditionalism haunts the Christian Church.

Halík harshly criticizes this tendency, evident especially in the first half of the 20th century and its respective outcomes nowadays: “Anxiety caused by the loss of political and cultural positions and the status of the intellectual elite did not lead the Church nobility to a self-critical search for real causes of this state of affairs but to a paranoid ‘witch-hunt’ in which the Church forfeited many of its best minds through intimidation, persecution and psychological pressure. Thus the

⁴ Cf. Tomáš Halík, “Křesťanství a laicity,” *Universum* 1 (2013), pp. 17-19; here p. 18.

⁵ Tomáš Halík, *Vzýván i nevzýván* (Praha: Lidové noviny, 2004), p. 61.

⁶ Halík, *Vzýván i nevzýván*, p. 55.

⁷ Halík, “Křesťanství a laicity,” p. 18.

Church intellectually castrated itself to a large extent. This self-undoing tendency would gradually bring the Church into the position of a marginal obscure sect at the edge of society”⁸ Vatican II, in Halík’s opinion, fortunately interrupted this defensive mentality resulting in hostility towards the secular world. Since the modern paradigm shift, for the Catholic Church, Vatican II represents the first serious attempt to step out of *Catholicism* to *Catholicity* and thus an attempt to recontextualize the notion of *Christianitas* by leaving the notion of *societas perfecta* behind.

For Halík, Vatican II is a step towards a renewed relationship between the Church and secular culture. This is, however, possible only under the condition that the Church moves beyond the modern kind of oppositional thinking. Thus Halík offers a sort of postmodern critique of the phenomenon of Catholicism as a product of modernity and the modern mentality. According to Halík, the term ‘*Catholic-ism*’ refers to a particular historical form of the Catholic tradition. The Church developed into a closed ghetto and counter-cultural system against the modern world. Metaphorically expressed, the Church in the period of modernity is more like a fortress with high walls than a mother with open embracing arms.⁹ ‘*Catholic-ism*’ built up a ‘parallel world’ which caused the Catholic Church to move to the margins of society. “Instead of offering spirituality and mysticism, Christianity offered moral commands and interdicts. Instead of initiation to the mysteries of faith, memorizing the catechism was imposed. Instead of spiritual leadership, submissiveness to the Church authority was requested.”¹⁰ Thus Catholicism developed a coherent Catholic system in order to build up a secure place in a Godless world. A defensive mentality created an ideological system not dissimilar to other modern ideologies. Paradoxically, the aggressive orientation of the Church resulted in the acceptance of certain aspects of modern logic. Halík mentions the example of a disproportionate emphasis on the papacy and papal authority (*ultramontanism*) strikingly reminiscent of the political power of the modern national state. In theology, the shift from Thomism to Neo-Thomism ended up in accepting the logic of modern rationalism

⁸ Halík, “Křesťanství a laicita,” p. 18.

⁹ “Horrible evidence of the mentality of the late modern era is the ‘Syllabus Errorum’ published by Pius IX; likewise the combat against modernism which degenerated into the paranoid spying and bureaucratic bullying of many honest theologians.” Tomáš Halík, *Co je bez chvění, není pevné* (Praha: Lidové noviny, 2002), p. 153.

¹⁰ Tomáš Halík, *Stromu zbývá naděje: Krize jako šance* (Praha: Lidové noviny, 2009), p. 48.

(*clare et distincte*). In order to illustrate what the logic of ‘Catholic-ism’ is, Halík highlights the famous statement of Pius XI: ‘against any political party we will establish a Catholic party, against any association we will establish a Catholic association, and against any publisher we will establish a Catholic publisher.’¹¹ The ideological system of Catholicism entered the war against the ideological system of humanism, atheism, socialism, liberalism, scientific positivism, and even Protestantism etc. Without irony, Halík praises secularization (which in an important sense has been acknowledged by Vatican II), as a deliverance from the aforementioned mentality of Catholicism and as a factor that helped to pave the way for *Catholicity* as an authentic form of the Church in the contemporary context. This authentic form is not based on restoration of any previous form of the Church, neither is it based on any cheap adaptation to current culture. Catholicity rather includes a universal openness in line with the Biblical notion of openness and the Patristic theological principle *ecclesia semper reformanda*.¹² In this respect, Halík believes that the Pauline heritage is of crucial importance. The theology of the apostle Paul opens Christianity to other contexts outside of the Jewish world. Paul shows that Christianity is not a religion analogous to Judaism or Roman cults. The Christian Church must be a permanently open community. Christianity must develop a community entering into new contexts and accepting new possibilities of theological reflection.¹³ “Catholicity (universality, completeness) means ‘openness’. The Church living out its Catholicity is the Church striving for openness to all. Catholicity is related to the miracle of Pentecost, speaking in all languages.”¹⁴

It is worth mentioning that for Halík the term *Catholicity* is is not a confessional designation.¹⁵ Catholic identity should imply a different meaning than for example, a Marxist identity. The adjective ‘Catholic’ is not an ideological brand of some kind of closed narrative. Catholic tradition is continually undergoing interruptions of permanent crisis.

¹¹ An inquiry into historical documents does not confirm Halík’s ascription of this quote to Pius XI. As a matter of fact we have found this quote in the text of the Czech bishop Brynych (1846-1902). Cf. M. Kovář, “Biskup Edna a Jan Nep. Brynych,” *Sborník historického kroužku* 1 (1903), pp. 1-3; here p. 1.

¹² Cf. Halík, *Vzývání i nevzývání*, pp. 223-224.

¹³ Cf. Halík, *Stromu zbývá naděje*, p. 84-85.

¹⁴ Halík, *Vzývání i nevzývání*, p. 234.

¹⁵ “To be a Catholic does not mean a strict affiliation with one of many Christian denominations. Rather, it is the commitment to work for the universal openness of the Church.” Halík, *Vzývání i nevzývání*, p. 251.

Catholic identity should always be initiating, creative, responsible, and open until the coming of the eschaton. In other words, Catholicity must be universally open to questions from academia and society in order to permanently recontextualize itself.¹⁶

Analogously to the previous distinction between *Catholicity* and *Catholicism*, Halík distinguishes between *secularization* and *secularism*.¹⁷ The former is the outcome of Christianity. It functions as a purification of faith and thus demands a responsible Christian identity within a changing world. The latter, on the contrary, designates the ideology of “neutral objectivity” deduced from the modern positivist logic. Consequently, secularism leads to individualism with the crypto-metaphysical doctrine of materialism.¹⁸ The emphasis on secularization in contrast to secularism, analogously to the counter-poles of Catholicity and Catholicism, demonstrates Halík’s quest for the theological thinking paradigm between the Scylla of ideological religious triumphalism and the Charybdis of ideological secularism. In this sense we can say that Halík belongs to the diverse group of postmodern authors who strive to recover whatever is holy and noble in both religion and culture.

Halík, for example, sympathizes with the postmodern philosopher Gianni Vattimo who claims that secularization is a specific form of Christianity.¹⁹ Halík formulates an interesting question about whether secularization could be interpreted as a realization of Christ’s *kenosis* (i.e. self-emptying). Furthermore, Halík asks whether the process of secularization could be understood as a step forward in the development of Christian tradition in the postmodern context.²⁰ Halík suggests that the essential element of secularization is the fight against corrupt forms of religion in the public square. This endeavour is based on internal elements of the Christian tradition: i) the biblical ethos of the

¹⁶ For Halík, a (Catholic) university is an optimum place for the realization of such identity. Consequently, the mission of (Catholic) universities includes promoting a genuine universality and a genuine openness. Cf. *Vzývání i nevzývání*, p. 238.

¹⁷ He accepts the distinction made by the German theologian F. Gogarten, the founder of the so-called ‘theology of secularization’. Friedrich Gogarten, *Verhängnis und Hoffnung der Neuzeit. Die Säkularisierung als theologisches Problem* (Stuttgart: Friedrich Vorwerk, 1953).

¹⁸ Cf. Halík, *Vzývání i nevzývání*, pp. 118-119.

¹⁹ Cf. Gianni Vattimo, *Belief* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), pp. 46-48.

²⁰ Cf. Tomáš Halík, *Patience with God: The Story of Zaccheus Continuing in Us* (New York: Doubleday, 2009), pp. 39-43; Halík, *Vzývání i nevzývání*, 9. In fact, Halík claims to be the first one to raise such a question of secularization as the next stage in the development of the Latin Christian tradition. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 347.

desacralisation of nature and politics clearly expressed in the Hebrew Bible and in the New Testament; (ii) the division of the secular and ecclesial spheres as a consequence of the Investiture Controversy in the Middle-Ages; (iii) Christian humanist attempts to establish a non-confessional alternative to the warring camps of Protestants and Catholics in the early modern era. The modern era has arisen on the Christian foundations somewhat “naturally”. The disappearance of Christianity from European culture does not turn Europe into atheistic or non-religious entity. Rather, Europe has become “religious” in a different way when compared with the classical understanding.

What is the role of the Church in this new European cultural setting? According to Halík, the Church faces an important but difficult task to be just the Church. It is quite obvious that various world-views show a permanent tendency to deteriorate into ideologies. This happens to be the case with some religious and some secular narratives as well.²¹ The Church ought to consciously fight against this omnipresent and eternal temptation. The Church has an uneasy task to “*prevent the secular culture from becoming a para-religion*.” The secular culture of the West is really secular and nonreligious to the extent to which it is Christian.”²² Europe has two faces: the Christian and the secular. How should we arrange the coexistence of both, similar yet different faces, in the same area? A polite tolerance is certainly not enough. An unmediated opposition is counter-productive. The Church, for its part, must go further. Halík puts it boldly: “The future of Europe lies in finding a dynamic compatibility between two European traditions: the Christian one and the secular-humanistic one.”²³

The Parable of the Prodigal Son might be interpreted in a new way in light of what has been said above. Christianity and secular humanist culture are “brothers” since they have the same mother, Europe, and the same grandparents, the Jewish faith and ancient wisdom. However, thinking of contemporary Christianity in relation to the secular culture we tend to forget that there is also the same father, the

²¹ Using the term ‘Western civilization’ or simply the ‘West’, Halík means Euro-Atlantic civilization which grew up from Christian tradition which is itself based on the encounter of Jewish faith and ancient Greek philosophy and Roman law, however, interrupted by the Reformation and Enlightenment. Cf. Halík, *Co je bez chvění*, p. 173.

²² Tomáš Halík, *Divadlo pro anděly: Život jako náboženský experiment* (Praha: Lidové noviny 2010), p. 131.

²³ Tomáš Halík, *Chci, abys byl. Křesťanství po náboženství* (Praha: Lidové noviny, 2012), p. 26.

Enlightenment.²⁴ However much Christians refer to ancient authorities such as St. Augustine, or St. Thomas Aquinas, their reading of them cannot but be through post-Enlightenment lens and we dare to add through postmodern lens as well.²⁵ Halík is strongly convinced of his postmodern enlightened belief: “When Christianity takes secular humanism seriously and embrace it as its brother, contemporary secular culture will be able to take Christianity seriously.”²⁶

The meeting between Christianity and secularization has caused two things. Firstly, Christianity no longer functions as the integrative element of Western society. Secondly, secularization functions as an “interruption” of ecclesial and institutional Christianity. The process of secularization reveals a crisis of both pre-modern religion mirroring the form of ancient *religio*, and modern religion emphasising the confessional-institutional nature of religious identity. Thus, according to Halík, the process of secularization results in the definitive divorce between Christian faith, the ancient concept of *religio* as an integrative force in society and the modern concept of a closed religious narrative.²⁷ Secularization, therefore, is not the process of de-Christianization of society. It just forces Christianity to recontextualize itself into a new shape. In other words, Halík emphasizes the same thing as Charles Taylor does in his recent *opus magnum*; i.e. secularization is, above all, about the changed conditions of faith.²⁸ In other words, what we face in

²⁴ Cf. Halík, *Patience with God*, pp. 83-84.

²⁵ For example the Radical Orthodoxy movement claims to go back to the pre-modern form of Christianity. This strategy is, however, based on certain (postmodern) presuppositions which would have been impossible without Kant, so to say.

²⁶ Halík, *Chci, abys byl*, p. 229.

²⁷ Cf. Halík, *Co je bez chvění*, pp. 160-161.

²⁸ In addition to that, Halík develops also the ideas of T. Luckmann, particularly his theory of secularization as a process of individualization and privatization of religion which becomes “invisible” (cf. Thomas Luckmann, *The invisible Religion: The Problem of Religion in Modern Society* [New York: Maxmillan 1967]) and P. L. Berger’s identification of the roots of secularization as genuinely Western and secularization as “pluralisation” (cf. Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* [Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971]; Peter L. Berger, *A Far Glory: The Quest for Faith in an Age of Credulity* [New York: Free Press, 1992]). Similarly to the aforementioned thinkers, Halík is convinced that man is *homo religiosus*. Friedrich D. E. Schleiermacher, the “Church father of the 19th century” (so first Hermann Weiß), postulates besides the metaphysical and moral realms also the *religious area* in human mind. Cf. Friedrich D. E. Schleiermacher, *Über die Religion: Reden an die Gebildeten*

the current era is the change of religious *forms*, but *not its contents*.²⁹ Nonetheless, the alienation from a certain type of Christian culture opens space for a new contextual form of Christianity. The crisis does not affect religion as such but certain religious language strategies which are not contextually plausible and theological valid anymore.³⁰ To put it differently, the process of secularization is one particular form of Christian heritage in Europe and at the same time a sort of recontextualisation of Christian tradition.

“A spectre is haunting Europe, the spectre of religion,” says Halík in paraphrasing Marx’s famous quote.³¹ Despite all possible assumptions, the process of secularization does not result in a non-religious society. Only certain forms of religion are weakened. But faith remains and looks for new ways of expression.³² This is almost a common sense fact among contemporary theologians and sociologists of religion. However, the situation of postmodernity is ambiguous. Many are obsessed with discussing God, religion, and moral values. Some people want to expel religion from the public square into a private sphere and still tell the story of modernity as an emancipation from religion.³³ Others call for preservation of the closed confessional character of Christian tradition in accordance with the modern story.

unter ihren Verächtern (1799), G. Meckenstock (ed.) (Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 1999), § 37 (according to the first edition), p. 72. Halík finds religion to be a *conditio humana*. “I try to explain to people that religion does not solely concern those people who think God exist.... The sphere of religion, in the broad and basic meaning of the expression, is as fundamental and natural a part of human life as the ethical, the aesthetic, or the erotic, and just as in the case of those areas of life, it can have a different connotation and orientation for specific individuals, and there are different degrees to which it can be cultivated or, alternatively, neglected and undeveloped.” Tomáš Halík, *Night of the Confessor: Christian Faith in an Age of Uncertainty* (New York: Image Books/Doubleday, 2012), p. 118.

²⁹ Cf. Tomáš Halík, “Katolická církev v České republice po roce 1989,” in *Společnost v přerodu* (Praha: Masarykův ústav AV ČR, 2000), p. 146.

³⁰ Halík, “Katolická církev v České republice po roce 1989,” 153. For example, a banal image of God is no more credible. Cf. Halík, *Chci, abys byl*, 84.

³¹ Halík, *Vzýván i nevzýván*, 321.

³² Cf. Tomáš Halík, “Globalizace a náboženství,” in *Globalizace*, Václav Mezřický (ed.) (Praha: Portál, 2003), pp. 133-147.

³³ For example, the proponents of the so-called “New Atheism” such as Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, and Christopher Hitchens, a. o.

Others even try to persuade contemporary society that pre-modern *Christianitas* was the ideal form of European civilization.³⁴

Halík's analysis, however, shows that contemporary Christianity is neither *religio* with its integrative power,³⁵ nor a cultural phenomenon in the modern sense. In Halík's opinion, Christian identity primarily means having an individual and particular identity in a pluralistic society.³⁶ Belonging or not belonging to a particular tradition is not easily transmitted by the tradition itself; it is a matter of individual choice.³⁷ "A fundamental challenge our civilization currently faces is to learn to live in the conditions of radical plurality. It is a challenge for politics, culture as well as religion."³⁸ We face an urgent need to speak and to think about Christian identity in new ways. Tomáš Halík suggests some ways forward in such dilemmas. We will focus on that in the third part of this chapter. Before that, we will describe the particular cultural context to which Halík is responding, i.e. the contemporary Czech culture.

BLESSED ARE THE DISTANT: CONTEMPORARY (CZECH) RELIGIOUS SCENE

Den Fremden verstehen – understanding the stranger is the hermeneutical principle of Halík's theology.³⁹ Halík believes that in order to understand Christian faith, a plurality of perspectives must be taken into consideration. Influenced by Nietzsche, he talks about perspectivism. This rather unusual philosophical stand-point, at least for a Catholic theologian, helps Halík to see theological and spiritual things from many different angles. On the results of such epistemology is Halík's emphasis on the category of patience. Faith and patience are sisters. Unfortunately, the Church often fails to recognize that and loses

³⁴ For example, John Milbank, "Postmodern Critical Augustinianism: A Short *Summa* in Forty Two Responses to Unasked Question," *Modern Theology* 7 (1991), pp. 225-237.

³⁵ According to Halík market economy and especially media have taken over the role of *religio* in the contemporary Western society: they make "big stories" and "celebrities", they are arbiters of truth, they interpret reality and define the importance of news.

³⁶ Cf. Livien Boeve, *Interrupting Tradition. An Essay on Christian Faith in a Postmodern Context* (Louvain: Peeters, 2003), pp. 79-80.

³⁷ Cf. Halík, "Globalizace a náboženství," p. 140.

³⁸ Halík, *Vzývání i nevzývání*, p. 128.

³⁹ We borrow the phrase *Den Fremden verstehen* from Theo Sundermeier, *Den Fremden verstehen: Eine praktische Hermeneutik* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996).

the opportunity to address those who are, for whatever reason, beyond its borders. This is, in Halík's opinion, what happened in the Czech Republic after the fall of communism.

Faith and Patience

Halík's interpretation of the current religious situation is indebted to Paul Tillich from whom he borrows the basic distinction between two groups of people. Tillich refuses a simple polar division between believers and unbelievers. He prefers to talk about the *open-minded* and *closed-minded* people. However, religion is not only the matter of cognitive abilities. Thus Halík shifts the intuition of the German theologian and suggests the differentiation between people of open *hearts* and those of close *hearts* (instead of minds). It is clear that Halík favours the former group over the latter. What does it mean to be open-minded? In Halík's opinion, it means to be opened to Mystery, to the Depth of Being that invites, and even excites the person to ask questions opening ways towards new interpretations of reality. This existential query is *faith*.⁴⁰

Halík finds himself in full agreement with Gabriel Marcel: Mystery – contrary to a problem – cannot be conquered. "One must wait patiently at its threshold and persevere in it – must carry it in one's heart – just as Jesus's mother did."⁴¹ In contrast, close-minded people do not hesitate to manipulate with reality.⁴² They are ready to withdraw from questions which make their lives uneasy and perhaps uncomfortable. This is precisely what the Psalmist means, while he is crying: "They close their hearts to pity; with their mouths they speak arrogantly" (Ps 17:10).

Whether *I* consider *myself* to be open-minded or not, it is not important. According to the Christian confession of faith, God is not a God *of* Christians or *for* Christians. God is not a tribal deity, but the "Maker of heaven and earth" and the "Lord of history". God is always bigger – *Deus semper maior*. "God takes part in the story of *each* human being. God wants to enter the sanctuary of every human heart."⁴³ When

⁴⁰ The Czech language can't distinguish *faith* from *believe*. But in Halík's using of the Czech word for faith/believe ("víra") prevails the meaning of *faith* than *believe*.

⁴¹ Halík, *Patience with God*, p. x.

⁴² Jan Jandourek, *Tomáš Halík: Ptal jsem se cest* (Praha: Portál, 1997), p. 281.

⁴³ Halík, *Stromu zbývá naděje*, p. 81. Cf. Halík, *Divadlo pro anděly*, pp. 180-181.

explicit faith is not found there, God seeks an implicit one. Halík explains this idea with the help of Depth Psychology. Human psyche is like an iceberg – just one tenth of it is visible. This is what we call “consciousness”. Nevertheless, it is only a minor part of the entire human psyche. This perspective analogously applies to religious faith. Halík claims that there are people who may refuse, for various reasons, to consider themselves to be believers in any traditional sense. However, in the hidden depth of their existence, their *hearts* “are fully open to Love”.⁴⁴ “God speaks not only through His word but also through His silence. He speaks to people not only through His closeness, but also through His remoteness.”⁴⁵ Open-minded people who are not explicit believers testify their implicit and anonymous faith through the acts of charity and their hope that life is a meaningful, although extremely difficult endeavour.⁴⁶

These ideas might remind us of Karl Rahner and his concept of anonymous Christians. Halík’s proposal, however, is based on a different ground. He has in mind an anonymous faith which, “pours itself into love”⁴⁷ or into hope.⁴⁸ Such an implicit faith includes a specific form of *patience*. This faith in a sense *is* patience. For patience is a metaphysical quality, an element engraved in being itself. Patience is a potential possibility of every person. Halík suggests that the patience of being – *passio essendi* – is prior to the drive to be – *conatus essendi*.⁴⁹ In other words, patience is an existential precondition of every action. Patience is something given to every conscious being. Everyone is free to refuse this gift and simply give up patience. But patience belongs to the wholeness of life and the fidelity to patience is already a participation in the splendour of being. It is really no accident that the translation of Halík’s book *Vzdáleným na blízku* (literally: To Stand by the Distant) is aptly entitled *Patience with God*.

The category of patience reveals an enigmatic analogy between God and humanity. God can address us human beings implicitly,

⁴⁴ Halík, *Ptal jsem se cest*, p. 282.

⁴⁵ Halík, *Patience with God*, p. 211.

⁴⁶ Cf. Halík, *Patience with God*, pp. 197-198.

⁴⁷ Halík, *Stromu zbývá naděje*, p. 81.

⁴⁸ Halík, *Stromu zbývá naděje*, p. 82. Cf. the encyclical of Benedict XVI *Spe salvi* whose ideas Halík – not without reservations – develops. For the time that is beginning will be hope perhaps the most important. Cf. Tomáš Halík, *Dotkni se ran: Spiritualita nelhostejnosti* (Praha: Lidové noviny 2008), p. 239.

⁴⁹ This complex philosophical idea of *passio essendi* and *conatus essendi* is well captured by the Irish philosopher William Desmond, *God and the Between* (London: Wiley-Blackwell 2008).

somehow anonymously. We human beings can answer with equally implicit, anonymous faith which can be explained as patience of being. Despite the analogy there is of course no necessary direct proportion: An implicit action of God does not need to evoke implicit faith. People with open hearts wait for God as well as God waits for them. Both need patience.

An Impatient Faith – the Czech Situation

According to Halík, there is no real chasm between the religious situation in the Czech Republic and in other European countries. It is true though that the background of the Czech religious situation contains several specific elements. For example, in consequence of certain “historical injuries of the relationship between the nation and the Church” what emerged in Czech cultural history was a sort of anticlericalism, having the form of “love-hatred, an injured love that has developed into hatred.”⁵⁰ It is necessary to take these wounds seriously otherwise they will continue to bleed. The only available treatment is to enhance *dialogue* between the Church and society. Nevertheless, the effort invested in such dialogue is hardly sufficient. Since the fall of the Iron Curtain, the Church repeats the same mistakes again and again. Sometimes naïvely, at some other times arrogantly, the Church tries to reconstruct the model of modern religiosity; i.e. a cultural religiosity without disturbing questions. Unfortunately, it completely overlooks the fact that religiosity has always existed also “at the periphery of the ecclesial religion and beyond its visible borders.”⁵¹ Moreover, this trend proves to be stronger and stronger. Enthusiasm for Christian values (especially for their moral and social aspects) has not vanished in the Czech society but “has just lost its traditional shape.”⁵² Greatest cultural heroes of Czech history (e.g. Bolzano, Havlíček, Palacký, Masaryk, Čapek, Patočka, Havel) were neither atheists, nor ordinary Church believers. In any case, a transcendent dimension of life, even though they had various names for it, was absolutely essential for them. Halík calls this phenomenon of the past and present *shy religiosity*: “as if the Czech believer felt on herself/himself a sceptical and ironic look of an unbeliever.”⁵³

Halík thus observes a gradual shift of Czech religiosity “from the surface inwards, from visible forms to informal forms, from

⁵⁰ Halík, “Katolická církev v České republice po roce 1989,” p. 152.

⁵¹ Halík, “Katolická církev v České republice po roce 1989,” p. 152.

⁵² Halík, “Katolická církev v České republice po roce 1989,” pp. 152-153.

⁵³ Halík, “Katolická církev v České republice po roce 1989,” p. 153.

metaphysical-theological vocabulary to the discourse of open humanism.”⁵⁴ In sum, the highly secularized Czech culture is not irreligious or anti-religious but paradoxically quite open and sensitive to vertical-transcendent dimensions of human existence.

Among the factors that have contributed to this paradoxical state of affairs, we must also name the experience of totalitarianism. Communist totalitarianism functioned in a cunning way. Besides the external oppression using brutal force, which we would not wish to underestimate, the totalitarian regime preferred to target the internal side which made the situation even more serious.⁵⁵ Totalitarianism did not merely oppress, it ruined society and people from within. It easily happened that Christians and advocates of secular humanism found themselves on the same side of the battle field struggling for human rights.

Interestingly, the typically Czech shy religiosity gets out of its anonymity in dramatic moments of history. For example, after the Munich Treaty, which was an ante-room of totalitarianism in Central Europe, Czechs participated massively in several national pilgrimages with a clear religious and even Catholic character. The celebration of the 1100th anniversary of the death of St. Method the Apostle of Slavs, which happened still in the shadow of the Iron Curtain, was attended by 150.000 participants and thus it turned out to be the biggest post-war (religious) meeting in former communist Czechoslovakia. These and many other events attracted not only Christians but also a large crowd coming from beyond the official borders of the Church. Apart from such spontaneous and massive events numerous dissident activities were taking place in which secular and religious intellectuals from various ideological camps actively participated. Rather unlikely assemblies of activists such as Marxists, reform Communists, Conservative philosophers and Christians of all denominations were regularly working together and discussing thorny problems of politics, philosophy, and even religion. Without a common enemy; i.e. the totalitarian regime of the Communist party, however, these alliances of, in Halík’s terms, “explicit believers and implicit believers” fades away.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Halík, “Katolická církev v České republice po roce 1989,” p. 153.

⁵⁵ “Totalitarianism is never content to rule by external means, namely, through the state and a machinery of violence; thanks to its peculiar ideology..., totalitarianism has discovered a means of dominating and terrorizing human beings from within.” Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973), p. 325.

⁵⁶ Cf. Halík, *Patience with God*, pp. 81-82.

Immediately after the fall of the totalitarian regime, the Church, and especially the Catholic Church, had a high degree of moral credibility in the Czech society. The Church was perceived as the only institution with authority.⁵⁷ Some ecclesial representatives were accepted almost uncritically. This was also the case with Tomáš Halík.⁵⁸ Regrettably, the Church began to be preoccupied with its own internal problems shortly afterwards. Probably the most serious one was the issue of incorporating the underground (dissident) Church into the official Church structures. What at first sight seemed to be a simple juridical problem opened a Pandora's box. The collaboration of many priests and religious people with the communist regime was discovered. This caused, on the one hand, a huge disappointment among intellectuals. On the other hand, a vast majority of people were simply perplexed about what was going on in the Church. At the end of the day, the interest in the Church decreased⁵⁹ and some obvious consequences appeared: "The Church has sunk into a tired pragmatism and has become one of the large badly functioning institutions. It has disappointed the Czech society, because it became clear that it differs from it little, therefore it has very little to offer."⁶⁰ The consequences are catastrophic. The crowds of religiously sensitive Czechs who just discovered their openness to spiritual questions, lost their patience overnight. The Czech Church could have been a pioneer in developing new ways in dealing

⁵⁷ The program "Desetiletí duchovní obnovy národa" ("A decade of a spiritual renewal of the nation") contributed to it. It was declared by Cardinal František Tomášek in November 1987. Tomáš Halík was one of the crucial figures of the program formation. But when he evaluates the result of the program, he is quite critical: "...I have a painful feeling at least in one respect: most of the priests and laymen grasped this project in a traditional sense as a succession of pilgrimages to national patrons and overlooked its very meaning – to show the Christian awareness of responsibility for the entire life of society." Halík, *Vzývání i nevzývání*, p. 208.

⁵⁸ The same can be said about Cardinal František Tomášek or the later auxiliary bishop of Prague Václav Malý.

⁵⁹ The collaboration of priests (grouped in societies such as "Peace Movement of the Catholic Clergy" and its "Pacem in terris"), and some laymen, with the communist regime has in fact been used as an instrument of enforced conformity of believers with the communist totalitarianism. This, in Halík's understanding, is one of paradoxes of Czech religious history. Cf. Libor Prudký, *Církev a sociální soudržnost v naší zemi* (Praha: UK FSV CESES, 2004), pp. 7-12; here p. 8. Available online: www.ceses.cuni.cz/CESES-20-version1-sesit04_10_prudky.pdf [accessed 12 January, 2014].

⁶⁰ Halík, *Vzývání i nevzývání*, p. 209.

wisely with secularization. The impatience of the Church leaders, however, buried this unique opportunity.

The Church failed not only in promoting dialogue but also in its public role in general. It is easier to care for a group of loyal members and occasionally moralize from the security of the Catholic fortress. Halík, together with a few other publicly involved Christians, repeatedly suggests that faith belongs to the public square in a different way. For Halík, the presence of the Church in the public domain does not mean any one-sided missionary strategy of recruiting souls. He rather sympathizes with Pope Benedict XVI who says that the Church should – in the manner of the Temple in Jerusalem – build a “courtyard for nations”. This place would be intended for those who are not fully identified with the Church. It is not a coincidence that Benedict XVI formulated this request on his apostolic visit to the Czech Republic. Halík’s vision goes even a step further and beyond the intention of Pope Benedict.

The metaphor used by the Pope contains residual traces of a triumphalist understanding of the Church (the Church as a “majestic building” that mercifully turns to “pagans”). Thus, Halík prefers to speak about the *mutual encounter of pilgrims* or *solidarity of pilgrims*. *Communio viatorum* presents the most fitting model of the Church.⁶¹ Halík implements this ecclesiological model in the parish where he serves as the pastor of university students in the capital of the Czech Republic. The *phenomenon of Salvator*, as the citizens of Prague sometimes call Halík’s parish, could be a theme of an extensive separate study. Here we limit ourselves to a short but unavoidable note. Halík’s theology is inseparable from his praxis and vice-versa. Theological reflection of the necessarily dialogical nature of faith, of openness towards seekers, and of contemporary religious as well as social questions is not only an abstract theory. For Halík, this is above all a matter of praxis. And this praxis bears its fruits. In the course of the last 20 years, Halík baptized more than 1000 adult persons. The theological ideas which are behind Halík’s pastoral success will be considered in what follows.

PATIENCE WITH GOD: AN ATTEMPT AT A THEOLOGY FOR A SECULAR AGE

Addressing Zacchaeus

⁶¹ Halík, *Divadlo pro anděly*, p. 146.

Jesus of Nazareth approached people on the fringe of society without hesitation. Jesus was permanently seeking those who were “distant” and “habitually ascribed positive roles to scorned groups such as the Samaritans, detested customs officials, prostitutes and other sinners. He devoted Himself to lepers, the physically handicapped and others who were excluded from society.”⁶² Jesus, the master of paradox⁶³, blesses those *on the edge*. For him, the oppressed, the exploited, and the persecuted are in the centre. Nevertheless, there are not only socially excluded people but also those who are excluded spiritually. To use the current theological vocabulary we call them seekers.

For Halík, seekers are at the core of theology. The archetype of seekers is exemplified in the story of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1–10). Zacchaeus’ faith provides an adequate description of the religious situation in the West. Contemporary seekers seek deeper values than the consumerist mode of life is able to offer. They respect other people and are sensitive towards the mysterious *something* that transcends us, even though they do not have a name for this *something*. Their faith remains individual – not for their haughtiness but because they need to be free in their seeking. Seekers cannot stand the institutionalized spirituality because it often provides ready-made answers instead of momentous questions. Seekers accuse the Church of being too assured of itself. They detest ponderous hierarchical structures which do not allow space for individual opinions and responsibility. How often do we hear that the Catechism contains all we need to know about God? Or even worse, how often are sermons full of pathetic phrases such as: “Just believe, dear sister/brother, and everything will be better!”

When seekers are taken into consideration, then distinguishing between Church members and Churchless people is not really helpful anymore. A much clearer picture is achieved when we differentiate between engaged seekers and indifferent people. The current challenge for the Church is to develop strategies to address the former group and to attract the latter group. Unfortunately, the Church still prefers to address the flock of loyal members. In this respect, Halík suggests the following: “The future destiny of the Church and its position in [the Czech] society depends largely on whether it succeeds in ‘calling Zacchaeuses’ by name”.⁶⁴

⁶² Halík, *Patience with God*, p. 13.

⁶³ Cf. Halík, *Patience with God*, p. 17.

⁶⁴ Tomáš Halík, “Oslovit vzdálené,” *Universum* 4 (2007), pp. 17-20; here p. 17.

Halík, however, does not propose any kind of direct missionary activity. According to him, seekers-Zacchaeuses will never become standard parishioners. “Yes, generally speaking – and particularly if our Churches will appear in the future more or less the way they do now (and as far as I know, God has promised us no miracle in that respect) – the Zacchaeuses will occupy a place on the fringe of the visible Church.... The point is that, without that ‘fringe’, the Church would not be a Church but a sect.”⁶⁵ The Church needs seekers because a clear borderline between *members* and *outsiders* is a sign of a sect, not of a Church. What Halík actually suggests might be interpreted as analogous in a sense to Liberation theology because Halík proposes a recontextualized version of the preferential option for the poor. Following Jesus, the Church should see its calling to preferential option for the poor not just in the economic-social sense and should “*prefer people on the edge of the community of faith*,” people who remain somewhere “between religious certainty and atheism.”⁶⁶ Zacchaeuses, the people on the fringe, can disturb the Church and individual Christians in their cosy religious dwelling. Seekers teach others that questions are sometimes more important than answers.

Halík reverses the order of things and says that the Church must learn from seekers instead of teaching them. He thus appears to be a postmodern thinker in his own way and presents his spiritual theology of interruption.⁶⁷ “Being able to take a look at how God appears from the standpoint of people who are searching, doubting, and questioning – isn’t this a new, exciting, necessary and useful *religious experience*?”⁶⁸ Faith and doubt are actually not opposites but sisters; they need one another in order to balance their one-sidedness. Faith without doubt is blind, superficial and fanatic. Doubt without faith is cynical, sceptical and hopeless.⁶⁹ The dialogue between faith and doubt goes on in every

⁶⁵ Halík, *Patience with God*, p. 77.

⁶⁶ Halík, *Patience with God*, p. 16.

⁶⁷ The term interruption was developed by Johan Baptist Metz in the context of political theology. Johann B. Metz, *Glaube in Geschichte und Gesellschaft: Studien zu einer praktischen Fundamentaltheologie* (Mainz: Matthias Grünewald Verlag, 1977). Later, the Flemish theologian Lieven Boeve used the term in the context of fundamental theology, namely for conceptualizing dialogue between theology and postmodern philosophy. Lieven Boeve, *God Interrupts History: Theology in a Time of Upheaval* (New York: Continuum, 2007). Halík does not use this term but we believe it is appropriate to understand his theology in this way.

⁶⁸ Halík, *Patience with God*, p. 18.

⁶⁹ Cf. esp. Halík, *Co je bez chvění, není pevné*, pp. 40-45.

human mind. Every human being is *simul fidelis et infidelis*.⁷⁰ “It is necessary to preserve a *spirit of seeking*... it is necessary to *remain open* because only in that way may we reach the Kingdom of God.”⁷¹ The task of contemporary Christians is to become *seekers with seekers and ask questions*. Of course, there are also people among seekers who do not understand their seeking and questioning as a religious quest but as the search for truth, justice, and good. Then, there are also people who prefer to be quiet about their questions and doubts because they do not want to profane the marvel of seeking.

This original contribution to the current theological debate about the state of the Church in a secular age, which Halík offers, is based on his long-term engagement with the ambiguous phenomenon of atheism.

Taking Atheism Seriously

If faith is liberated from its certainties, the same must happen with atheism. The number of convinced atheists as well as convinced Christians and other dwellers is decreasing. Nevertheless, the enigmatic term *atheism* is still quite popular as self-identification. Many of those who declare their atheism actually refer to their religious indifference. This is usually connected with mistaken ideas about the Church, or sometimes it is caused by ignorance or simplistic images of god. This type of (un)faith might perhaps be called *apatheism*. Halík, however, focuses on a different type of atheism, which must be taken seriously. First of all, Halík provocatively challenges both Christians and atheists:

Is atheism a sin? Yes – but only in the sense of a *debt*.... It is unfinished work, an unresolved matter, an uncompleted building. It is an unfinished and therefore unpalatable dish that needs a dash of the salt of faith. Atheism is a useful antithesis to naive, vulgar theism—but it is necessary to take a further step toward synthesis and mature belief.... But we must not fall prey to triumphalism or pride in these reflections—we must be aware that even ‘mature belief’ remains unfinished business as far as we are concerned and if we are to complete the task we need to take seriously the experience of atheism[.]⁷²

⁷⁰ Halík, *Chci, abys byl*, p. 20.

⁷¹ Halík, *Patience with God*, p. 17. Cf. Halík, *Oslovit Zachea*, p. 10.

⁷² Halík, *Patience with God*, 37.

Atheism is not only the opposite of belief. It is also a partner and even a teacher for those who believe. Atheism is “a mysterious contribution of historical time to the Easter drama.”⁷³ Nevertheless, there is a wide variety of atheistic experiences: a “devil-may-care atheism”; a “forgetting God atheism” that substitutes God with godlings; a “proud atheism” claiming that God must not be; and last but not least, a “liberating atheism” which deconstructs false images of God and human projections of God. Atheism opens the way to the (re)discovery of the mystery (of God) again. Halík interprets this experience or attitude as *an atheism of passion* because of its genuine struggle with faith (in God).⁷⁴

It is perhaps a provocative statement but, for Halík, a certain “logic of atheism” can be integrated into theology as a relevant methodological tool. Halík claims that there is a kind of religious experience common to atheists and believers, although both groups would interpret such experience differently.

Atheism in general insists that God is absent. Is this really an alien experience for Christians? If we think about the fundamental difference between God and the world, it seems reasonable to argue that “the divine way of being *present* [in the world] entails that we can experience God only as *absent*.”⁷⁵ However, Halík dares to take one step further. The atheism of passion is a radical expression of “the death of faith on the cross of our world; the hour when the individual is plunged into inner and outer darkness, ‘far from all suns’.”⁷⁶ Halík claims that the story of Christianity and the story of the atheism of passion conflate in Jesus’ scream: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mt 27:46; Mk 15:34) This atheism is a faith(less) confession of the truth of Good Friday. Thus, atheism is not necessarily a simple denial of God. It is, paradoxically, a sacramental experience. It is the very experience which Christians commemorate during the Good Friday liturgy and contemplate in the silent course of Holy Saturday. To be sure, Christians believe that this is not the end of Jesus’ story. Indeed, *God alone has suffered the distance of God* but after the repose of Holy Saturday, faith which had to die on the cross and was buried, is *resurrected* and rises anew.⁷⁷ The atheism of passion brings into play an important message

⁷³ Halík, *Patience with God*, p. 43.

⁷⁴ Halík, *Patience with God*, pp. 40-41.

⁷⁵ Frederiek Depoortere, “Taking Atheism seriously: A Challenge for Theology in the 21st Century,” in *Edward Schillebeeckx and Contemporary Theology*, F. Depoortere, L. Boeve and S. van Erp (eds.) (London, New York: T&T Clark, 2010), pp. 36-48.

⁷⁶ Halík, *Patience with God*, p. 41.

⁷⁷ Halík, *Patience with God*, p. 42.

for theology because it is, indeed, a genuine struggle with God who is silent, absent, and who seems to be dead.

The Church, in its teaching, is well-aware of the importance of this experience. The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes* suggests that: “atheism must be accounted among the most serious problems of this age, and is deserving of closer examination.”⁷⁸ However, Halík insists that it is necessary to exceed the horizon of Vatican II. Christian theology cannot afford to lose the (partial) truth of atheism. On the contrary, theology must ask the question: “Has not the time come to take into account the (partial) truth of atheism?”⁷⁹ But what is meant by this?

The Easter mystery reveals that the real enemy of faith is not atheism but *idolatry*. Halík reminds us that idolatry is not an ancient religious practice. Various forms of idolatry are present in contemporary context. Let us think about the so-called return of religion. Religiosity is returning, indeed. The question is: should the Church try to recognize the God of Jesus of Nazareth in contemporary religious trends? Should theology use the language of popular spirituality? Should Christians accept a sort of vague religiosity characterized by the popular phrase “I believe something must be above us?”⁸⁰ These questions would almost lead us to befriend (at least certain forms of) atheism. Why?

Hardly anybody takes God more seriously than real atheists.⁸¹ That does not seem to be the case of contemporary spiritual movements in the West. Halík approaches fashionable spiritual streams with some suspicion. They characteristically neglect important moral topics in the name of superficial individualism. They sometimes do not really count on transcendence but rather promote a sort of inner spirituality of the self. Last but not least, this “returning religion” is in most cases afraid of *wounds* and covers them with precision. Everything must be fantastic, cool, amazing, and deeply felt. The modern “Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason” (without dogmas) has turned into “Religion within the Bounds of Bare Experience” (without both dogmas and reason). Some people interpret this situation as a justification of fundamentalism that encourages a sort of return to faith without questions.⁸² Especially

⁷⁸ *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 19.

⁷⁹ Halík, *Co je bez chvění*, p. 87.

⁸⁰ “Something-ism” is the most popular religious ‘belief’ among Czechs. “I do not believe in God, but there is certainly something above us,” reads a common phrase.

⁸¹ Cf. Halík, *Patience with God*, p. xii-xv.

⁸² Halík, *Stromu zbývá naděje*, p. 83. Cf. Tomáš Halík, “Víra, rozum a hledání evropské identity,” *Universum* 1 (2007), pp. 21-22.

extremely conservative forms of Christianity and Judaism focus almost exclusively on moral themes. However, their moral agenda is narrowed down to questions which obsessively revolve around sex, whereas crucial ethical problems (e.g. the developments of technology, media, environment, social responsibility) are usually neglected.⁸³ In Halík's opinion, this is "a clear hypocrisy, *exchange of moral for a moral indignation*.... It represents a big moral failure of contemporary Christianity."⁸⁴ Instead of proclaiming a living God, there is only the toxin of "moralin" (so Nietzsche) spread out by nowadays Pharisees. Nothing but idols.

Atheism is different and therefore valuable, Halík believes. Its main contribution to theology is its anti-idolatrous nature. Atheism functions as an interruption of belief. After all, the atheism of passion which is at the same time an atheism of pain wounded by the existence of evil in the world, presupposes faith in the good and right order of the world. Halík's bold statement that the paradox of God should be preached on the edges of faith and atheism⁸⁵ must be understood in this context. From the perspective of a theologian, an atheist represents the other who takes God seriously. Of course, not every atheist is like this. But those who are present a sufficient reason for enquiring into their experience, listening to their questions, and learning how they are seeking understanding.

Looking for the Altar of an Unknown God

Seeking out where we can meet God in today's world, we propose that it is in questioning. God is, indeed, in our questions. And Halík reminds us that: "There are questions that are so important that it is a pity to spoil them with answers."⁸⁶ Arguably, the question pertaining to God may be one of those best left unanswered. Thus, Halík suggests that one of the most appealing challenges for the Church in the 21st century is that of opening a new Areopag and of finding the altar of an unknown God.⁸⁷

Paul preached the Gospel of an unknown God in Athens (Acts 17, 22-34). Theologians are called to follow Apostle Paul in this courageous task. For, indeed, the current state of affairs resembles the situation of those who were listening to Paul on Mount Areopag. God is no longer

⁸³ Halík, *Stromu zbývá naděje*, p. 54.

⁸⁴ Halík, *Stromu zbývá naděje*, p. 55.

⁸⁵ Cf. Halík, *Patience with God*, p. 108.

⁸⁶ Halík, *Chci, abys byl*, p. 15.

⁸⁷ Cf. Halík, *Patience with God*, pp. 113-121.

well-known. It is rather the case that the God of Jesus of Nazareth has ceased to be self-evident. The God of the Christian faith has become a sort of stranger.

What is behind this alienation? What if the decline of Christianity in the postmodern context is not caused by atheism or agnosticism? What if Christian faith is disappearing because our (Western) world is full of additional gods? Have we ever considered the idea that the God of the Gospels was not replaced by disbelief but by different beliefs? When this perspective is applied, it seems that there is a multitude of gods. All are easily available. All are moreover *very-well known* gods. These gods and their cults usually offer answers and solutions which Christian theology is not able to give. Maybe theology is guilty in this respect. But its guilt does not lie in refusing to answer. Theology is guilty because it does not ask enough questions.

The unknown God of paradox, preached by Paul on Areopag, has too often been substituted by some known god. Indeed, theologians struggle with an omnipresent temptation to treat God in human, *all too human* terms. The temptation to swap the paradoxical God of Jesus of Nazareth for some kind of a harmonized being accessible to our knowledge without disturbance or questions is something that runs through the course of Christian history. Nicholas Lash observes that theological questioning as a search for understanding has been replaced by the explanatory discourse. However, “explanation, unlike understanding, if successful comes to an end.”⁸⁸ Theology seems to be more or less unable to deal with the paradox that God dwells in the question. What would be the consequences of Halík’s call to set up the altar of an unknown God again? Let us speculate for a moment.

First, we have to go back to modernity and reinterpret the story of reason. Modernity changed the paradigm of thinking. The modern ethos was constituted by such claims as (i) the supreme authority of reason (*ratio*), (ii) the highest authority of natural sciences, especially mathematics and (iii) the idea of eternal progress.⁸⁹ Above all, modernity brought about changes in the conception of knowledge. For the first time, knowledge was defined as power (Bacon). Knowledge made humans effective and only what was effective was deemed knowledge. Thus, knowledge enabled humans to become masters of the universe (Descartes).⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Nicholas Lash, *Holiness, Speech and Silence: Reflections on the Question of God* (Aldershot, Burlington, VT: Ashgate Pub., 2004), pp. 1-22.

⁸⁹ Cf. Robert B. Pippin, *Modernism as a Philosophical Problem: On the Dissatisfaction of European High Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), p. 4.

⁹⁰ Cf. Jan Patočka, *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*

Naturally, this modern shift changed theology and heavily influenced theological epistemology. The idea that humans could speak clearly about the universe and master it led to the conviction that the same humans could speak clearly about God. In short, modernity developed a new form of rationalism, the rationalism of mastery⁹¹ and theologians used this mastery to conquer the altar of an unknown mysterious God. The question of God was replaced by the problem of God.⁹² In other words, theologians sought an unequivocal, clear and distinct language. And this is, more or less, our own conviction. Theology should adopt an unequivocal language in order to argue in the public square, to be perfectly understandable for ordinary people, and thus to attract them to Churches. According to these principles, which are rather the principles of early modern science,⁹³ God was perceived as an object. The result was the univocalisation of God and a shift from the question of God to answers about God.

Postmodern criticism proclaims the end of clear and distinct ideas, formulated from the bird's perspective, about the world, human beings and, last but not least, God. Postmodern critical consciousness initiates a different strategy, namely a sensitivity for the inexpressible, for the unrepresentable and for otherness. To use technical theological vocabulary; postmodernity takes *mystery* seriously again.

Halík works with a sort of postmodern critique as well. Remember that he went through the experience of totalitarianism. After the hell of totalitarian oppression, no one can claim that God is easily at our disposal. On the contrary, Halík's post-totalitarian perspective suggests that, when faced with the question of God, we must begin from the viewpoint of the night, darkness and uncertainty. Thus, the fact that God becomes a sort of a stranger is not necessarily an impasse. The current crisis is not a threat. Rather it is an opportunity to open up new

(Chicago: Open Court, 1996), pp. 83-84.

⁹¹ Cf. Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, p. 110.

⁹² Gabriel Marcel makes a famous distinction between *problem* and *mystère*. "A problem is something which I meet, which I find completely before me, but which I can therefore lay siege to and reduce. But a mystery is something in which I am myself involved, and it can therefore only be thought of as a sphere where the distinction between what is in me and what is before me loses its meaning and initial validity." Gabriel Marcel, *Being and Having* (Westminster: Dacre Press, 1949), p. 117.

⁹³ It must be noted that these principles we describe in the body of text are not identical with the principles of late modern science as shows, for example, Werner Heisenberg, *Physics and beyond: Encounter and Conversations* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971).

ways of understanding God and interpreting the role of Christianity in the world. Halík thus suggests a sort of recontextualizing of the idea of medieval university in order to enhance contextually plausible and theologically valid thought in the current secularized context.

The Church as a School/University

The idea of a university is grounded in service to wisdom. Halík believes that instead of the modern *sola ratione*, the path of wisdom as *docta ignorantia* must be promoted. According to Halík, spreading wisdom or rather spreading an educated faith is the most appealing task of the Church in the postmodern context. An intelligent faith does not fear doubts and can cope with God the stranger; *Deus semper maior*. Through this lens, Halík interprets the call for New Evangelization.

Halík does not understand “The New Evangelization” proposed by John Paul II., as a triumphalist religious mobilization. Were the call for Evangelization to be understood in that way, it is destined for failure. The New Evangelization should be a humble and patient ‘return to the school.’⁹⁴ It is “a challenge for a really *new*, even though quieter, slower, but first and foremost, *deeper* introduction of the therapeutic power of the Gospel to the very heart of our culture, and also to its hidden places.”⁹⁵ Christianity as *religio*, as the “sacred canopy” of the Western culture is gone. For long centuries Christianity was so present in European society that it became too self-evident and the mystery of God was forgotten. A continuing *metanoia*, as the core of faith, was slowly disappearing.⁹⁶ This school, however, is not the indoctrination of pupils by masters. It is rather the community of students (seekers of wisdom) and teachers who have already learnt that silence is the only possible answer to certain questions. This school is a community of shared life and sharing knowledge and prayer.

Halík reminds his readers of Rahner’s dictum – with which he agrees – that Christianity of the third millennium will be either mystical or it will not be at all. Nonetheless, Halík adds that Christian faith of the 21st century must also be a meditative-reflective faith. It is important to mention that in this respect Halík finds a strong ally in another German theologian – Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI.

Pope Benedict XVI once said that the Church should be rather a creative minority instead of a mass organization. Halík expresses a similar idea in the form of irony: “I do not really understand who has

⁹⁴ Halík, *Stromu zbývá naděje*, 70.

⁹⁵ Halík, *Dotkni se ran*, 74.

⁹⁶ Halík, *Dotkni se ran*, 75.

come up with the idea that Christianity is for masses.” All this is in line with Halík’s call for a *deep theological and spiritual renewal* in order to present Christianity as a “lifestyle”.⁹⁷ This ought to be the “Christianity of the second breath” based only on faith, hope, love – and their *school*.⁹⁸ “Maybe in the Czech Republic, where classical forms of the Church and religion were so strongly devastated and deracinated, this new form of Christianity is more likely to be successful than anywhere else where the end of the old form of religion is not as apparent yet.”⁹⁹ Maybe this is true for the entire Europe.

CONCLUSION

In what has been said so far we tried to demonstrate that the theological enterprise of Tomáš Halík is extensive. Halík discusses a wide range of themes, questions and theological problems. He proposes various original ideas. What we have learned from Halík can be summarized in four points. Firstly, the current historical form of Christianity is in crisis, a crisis caused by secularization. Halík insists that secularization of Western societies is not a threat. For him, this crisis is an opportunity, knocking on the door of Christianity. This crisis should be seen as the ongoing development of Christian tradition. Secondly, in order to deal with the current state of affairs we must engage in an open dialogue. This dialogue includes serious engagement with secularized society and contemporary philosophy. According to Halík, the Church has to give up its closed mentality, the mentality of a religious ghetto. Consequently, Christian theology and the Church must welcome ‘critical friends’. Atheism is not the enemy. Seekers are brothers and sisters. Certain forms of atheism and their respective criticism of religion challenge the Christian tradition to be more authentic. Certain experiences of seeking God, asking questions and looking for real depth should be incorporated into the life of the Church. Thirdly, this requires the virtue of courage. The task of the Church is to deconstruct its borders instead of constructing high walls. Halík emphasizes that the Church must welcome people who stand on the edges. The Church is compelled to meet these edge dwellers, many of whom show an interest in religion and Church related affairs but they, like Zacchaeus, need to be encouraged to meet with Jesus in *their* houses. Likewise, Halík suggests a broader ecclesial concept as a model for the Church in the postmodern context. Fourthly, Halík does not

⁹⁷ Halík, *Night of the Confessor*, pp. 126-127.

⁹⁸ Halík, *Night of the Confessor*, pp. 112-113.

⁹⁹ Halík, *Chci, abys byl*, p. 10.

propose any easy solution for the current crisis of Christianity and its ecclesial forms. He insists that we must live creatively throughout this crisis, and that the crisis is essential for the well-being of Christianity. The experience of crisis is an essential part of Christian faith.

These lessons gained from Halík lead us to the following critical questions. Firstly, we are convinced that we have to think about God in a different way. Halík's presentation of an open image of God is appealing. Instead of the closed images of *a too well known God*, it is essential to consider the concepts of *an unknown God*, and of *God the stranger*. However, we suspect that Halík uses the aforementioned terms describing God's mystery somehow automatically. God's mystery, indeed, exceeds our theological mastery; i.e. the knowledge of God we obtained through the gift of revelation. The very fact that we call God *an ultimate mystery*, or *the depth of our existence* is, in one way or another, a part of our knowledge of God. Thus we find a lack of more precise distinction between mystery and revelation in Halík's works. Let us illustrate this critical point with the following example. Halík claims that atheists contradict their own atheism when they fight against evil in this world. The struggle for the good and justice, in Halík's opinion, presupposes a sort of belief in some guarantor of a meaningful order in the world.¹⁰⁰ It seems that Halík operates here with a *known God*, at least, with a God which is known to him. The question is: How can Halík make such an easy link between God and the meaningful order of reality and, at the same time, claim that God is *an unknown mystery*? Thus, it seems that, for Halík, the concept of an unknown God belongs to the order of "known knows" about God. Of course, this is a legitimate position, however, Halík's readers would probably expect a more precise elaboration what these "known knows" about God contain. In other words, Halík's fundamental theological opinion: "God is mystery – that should be the first and last sentence of any theology;"¹⁰¹ should be complemented with the confession, *but still he has become a man*.

Secondly, Halík challenges the classical distinction between believers and unbelievers and replaces it with new counter-poles: open-minded people and close-minded people. As long as Halík uses this new concept as a descriptive tool, and we believe he does, everything is all-right. If the description turns out to be a judgement, we have a problem. In some texts, Halík seems to be dangerously close to a God-like-position when locating people in the aforementioned groups. It has to be added that we believe that when we consider what Halík says about

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Halík, *Stromu zbývá naděje*, p. 189.

¹⁰¹ Halík, *Patience with God*, p. 46.

open-minded and close-minded people within the entire context of his thought this concern proves to be pointless. Nevertheless, we have a second, more serious difficulty in this respect. Halík's distinction between the open-minded ones and close-minded ones together with his emphasis on the Church as the school of wisdom results in identifying all (good) Christians as ruminative. Not all Christians are sophisticated intellectuals.

This is linked to our third critical point. Halík certainly favours an open attitude towards culture. Thus, he stays close to the so-called correlation theology which postulates a sort of continuity between Christianity and the world. This becomes clear when Halík's analysis of secularization is taken into account. According to Halík, secularization is a Christian by-product. The correlationist orientation is also visible in other fields of Halík's interest; e.g. interreligious dialogue; the engagement with non-Christian prayer-techniques, etc. He prefers similarities over differences, continuity over discontinuity. Halík stands in line with important theological figures such as Paul Tillich, Edward Schillebeeckx, or Nicholas Lash etc. A potential danger in this line of theological thinking is reductionism of the genuine otherness of the other, despite explicit proclamations that otherness must be respected and approached with humility in dialogue. The emphasis on one-sided continuity between different experiences (both religious and secular) may result in projecting our Christian image on the *Other*.

To be sure, Halík balances his correlationist position with reference to postmodern hermeneutical philosophy, especially to such thinkers as Gianni Vattimo and Richard Kearney. Postmodern hermeneutics is very sensitive with regard to the particularity of the other. Only if we respect the particularity of others, can we claim the right to be respected in our own particularity. We can also put it vice-versa. Only if we are explicit about our own particularity; i.e. if we do not feel embarrassed for differences and discontinuity in relation to others, are we able to respect the others in their genuine otherness. We believe that Halík's turn towards postmodern philosophy of religion is a movement in the right direction. We await with much enthusiasm Halík's new project bearing the working-title *the afternoon of faith* – a sort of *post-faith*. We dare to say, however, that it will certainly be a valuable theological-philosophical contribution, if Halík remains himself – an author who goes beyond the borders of theology, philosophy and sociology. Halík's work is neither systematic theology, nor mere spirituality and by no means a sort of relativistic philosophy of religion. The entire project of Halík's intellectual and public work intertwines a radical hermeneutical (postmodern) position with traditional standpoints. This results in his attempt to overcome the modern division between theology and philosophy by focusing on *wisdom*. Thus, we suggest that

the *afternoon of faith* should not be a repetition of previous ideas but a new synthesis based on further research in biblical studies, systematic theology, sociology of religion, and postmodern philosophy. Halík must retain his identity of an essayist and should enlarge his identity as a philosopher. If that happens we will find in his forthcoming works a dossier for Christianity in the postmodern cultural context. Tomáš Halík must remain (as he has always been) standing between and reminding us of paradoxes.

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